



Tinnitus

This leaflet explains what tinnitus is and gives advice on how it can be treated or managed.

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is the name for sounds heard ‘in the ears’ or ‘in the head’, not originating from an external source. Tinnitus can take many forms (including buzzing, whistling, hissing). Tinnitus is extremely common and routinely occurs after loud noise exposure, in extremely quiet situations and with certain health conditions. For a small minority it can be distressing. There are a number of management and treatment options that can significantly reduce the effects of tinnitus.

Understanding how we interpret sound

Sound travels down the ear canal causing the ear drum to vibrate. This is transmitted via three bones of the middle ear into the cochlea (the organ of hearing) within the inner ear. Inside the cochlea are thousands of tiny hair cells that convert the sound to an electrical impulse which is passed to the brain via nerve fibres.

The brain analyses every incoming sound by matching it with a sound stored in its auditory memory. At the same time, we attach meaning to the sounds we hear (for example a lion’s roar would probably cause us to run, whereas a loud aircraft overhead would generally not prompt us to action). The end result is that we have the ability to filter out sounds on a ‘need to hear’ basis.

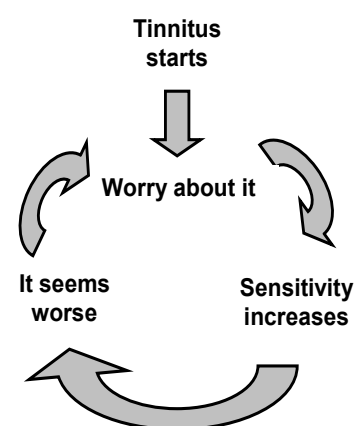
What triggers tinnitus?

Tinnitus occurs when the sound of electrical activity (the natural process outlined above) is perceived as a potentially dangerous signal. This is because the auditory memory cannot match it to any of the sounds stored in its memory bank. As a result, more attention can be paid to this unfamiliar, internal sound than to external / environmental sounds. In this way, an awareness “loop” can occur.

Tinnitus is considered to be a symptom and not a disease. The reason for a person’s awareness is therefore likely to be different from one individual to another. It may not be possible to identify a single trigger, but tinnitus appointments are likely to help you to identify contributory factors.

When a person with a hearing loss experiences tinnitus, the brain is often attending to their internal sounds because of a reduction in incoming sounds. In the majority of cases, regular use of a hearing aid can help to break this pattern, by providing the ear with more everyday sound, so reducing the strain on the auditory system.

Auditory gain can also be increased by changes in the emotional or physiological systems. Triggers for this can include stressful events, tension, or changes in health or medication.



Such factors are generally found to underlie tinnitus awareness when it triggers for people who do not have a hearing loss. In such cases it may be helpful to look at sound therapy or relaxation techniques. Lifestyle changes, however small, can also be hugely beneficial.

Coping strategies

- Understand the explanation of the tinnitus mechanism – this is fundamental to successful “tuning out”.
- Try not to think too much about your tinnitus. Dwelling on it is likely to make it appear worse. Distraction will speed up natural habituation, so keeping active with interests & hobbies is important.
- Stress management. Reduce stress levels using muscle relaxation exercises, breathing exercises, general exercise to improve fitness.
- Avoid silence as this strains your ears. Use devices for sound enrichment such as a tinnitus relaxer, pillow speaker, talking books, TV, radio, wearable sound generator, hearing aid (if appropriate).
- Aim for quality sleep. Consider the impact of lifestyle factors such as screen time, eating pattern, exercise and stress.

Further information

- RNID 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL Helpline: 0808 808 6666 (9:00am - 5:00pm) Information Line 0808 808 0123 Text phone: 0808 808 9000 SMS: 0780 000 0360 e-mail: contact@rnid.org.uk Web: <https://rnid.org.uk/>
- The British Tinnitus Association (BTA) Ground Floor, Unit 5, Acorn Business Park, Woodseats Close, Sheffield S8 0TB Helpline: 0800 018 0527 (9:15am - 4:30pm) Fax: 0114 258 7059 Office: 0114 250993 e-mail: info@tinnitus.org.uk Web: www.tinnitus.org.uk
- Hearing Link: information on hearing loss and tinnitus Tel: 0300 111 1113 SMS: 07526 123255 e-mail: enquiries@hearinglink.org Web: www.hearinglink.org

Devices

Relaxation, sound devices, pillow speakers etc these are available from multiple suppliers such as Connevens.

Further information available at RNID. Website: <https://rnid.org.uk/about-us/contact-rnid/> or Telephone: 0808 8080123 or Email: contact@rnid.org.uk

Free downloadable apps

Example from GN resound called ‘Tinnitus relief’.

There are multiple apps available; they all tend to contain breathing exercises, natural repetitive sounds and sometimes, meditation exercises.

If you have any further questions, please contact:

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T: 0118 322 7238 or email: audiology.royalberkshire@nhs.net

Website: <https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/services-and-departments/audiology>

Individual management plan:

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

If you would like this leaflet in other languages or formats (e.g. large print, Braille or audio), please contact the Audiology Department.